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Iran Is Reported Weighing Plans To Widen War

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WASHINGTON, May 24 — Reagan Administration officials have reportedly told members of Congress that some intelligence analysts believe Iran may be planning to widen the Persian Gulf war by attacking Saudi Arabian oilfields and sending suicide planes against oil tankers.

Congressional staff members said today that the officials had cited such reports as support for the tentative Administration decision, disclosed Wednesday, to provide Saudi Arabia with 1,200 portable Stinger aircraft missiles. The staff members said 200 missiles would be provided immediately and 1,000 later.

They Cite Emergency Powers

They said the first 200 missiles, accompanied by 100 launchers, would be provided to the Saudis through the President's emergency powers and would not have to be delayed for a 30-day Congressional review.

The House Speaker, Thomas P. O'Neill Jr., said today that "there is going to be an escalation of the war after June 1."

Mr. O'Neill, Democrat of Massachusetts, who had a closed-door briefing on Tuesday from Secretary of State George P. Shultz, added that he could not say more on the subject. But he said the United States should not get involved in the Persian Gulf situation except in concert with Britain and France.

A State Department official said later that intelligence analysts had said Iran might launch a major ground attack against Iraq during Ramadan, the Moslem month of dawn-to-dusk fasting, which begins June 1. Iranian forces, estimated to total hundreds of thousands of men, are said to have

been massed near the Iraqi border for months.

Other officials said the intelligence analysts had warned that the conflict could also be widened by an Iranian attempt to destroy the oilfields of Saudi Arabia, which backs Iraq in the war, or by an Iranian decision to send suicide flights of small planes carrying heavy explosives into tankers in the Gulf.

Doubt Saudis Will Seek Help

The officials said such moves could lead to a Saudi decision to retaliate in strength using American-made F-15's against Iranian installations. The officials said, however, that they thought it was unlikely that the situation would worsen to a point at which the Saudis might ask the United States to introduce naval and air power to help them.

The Iraqis also seem to be talking of increasing the fighting. On Tuesday President Saddam Hussein of Iraq said that the "the day is coming closer" when Iraq will have the weapons to destroy the Iranian oil terminal at Kharg Island and other major Iranian ports and oil installations.

A Western diplomat in Washington said today that he understood that the Iraqis were to receive medium-range SS-21 missiles with conventional warheads from the Soviet Union. These are said to have a range of several hundred miles and are an improved version of earlier, less-accurate missiles.

Last year the Soviet Union provided the SS-21 to the Syrians, the first time the weapon had been introduced into the Middle East.

U.S. Would Open Reserves

The Secretary of Energy, Donald P. Hodel, said today that if tensions in the Persian Gulf were to lead to a substantial oil shortage in Europe and Japan, the United States would open the sale of its strategic oil reserves to foreign bidders.

The reserve program is designed to store up to 750 million barrels of crude oil in underground caverns to be used

in the event of a significant worldwide oil shortage. The current level of reserves is 400 million barrels, Mr. Hodel said.

Mr. Shultz and other Administration officials have been consulting with leaders of Congress on the sale of the Stingers to Saudi Arabia, in the hope of avoiding a dispute. Last March, the Administration announced plans to provide Saudi Arabia with 1,200 Stingers and Jordan with 1,633, but the decision was canceled after Congressional opposition arose to the Jordanian sale.

The Stingers would be used, the Administration said in briefings conducted in the last two days, to improve security at the Saudi oilfields and to allow small Saudi boats to accompany tankers in the vicinity of their waters, carrying Stingers for protection. The Stingers have a range of about three miles and are considered effective against low-flying planes.

Concern about the sale of Stingers to Saudi Arabia was raised today by Senator Bob Kasten, Republican of Wisconsin, chairman of the Senate Appropriations subcommittee on foreign operations.

He said he did not think the Saudis' security situation was so precarious that the Administration should waive the usual rules for providing weapons. He said that there were many questions and that he preferred the 30-day period so that all the questions could be answered.

Mr. Kasten noted that the Saudis already have improved Hawk anti-aircraft missiles and portable Redeye missiles.